

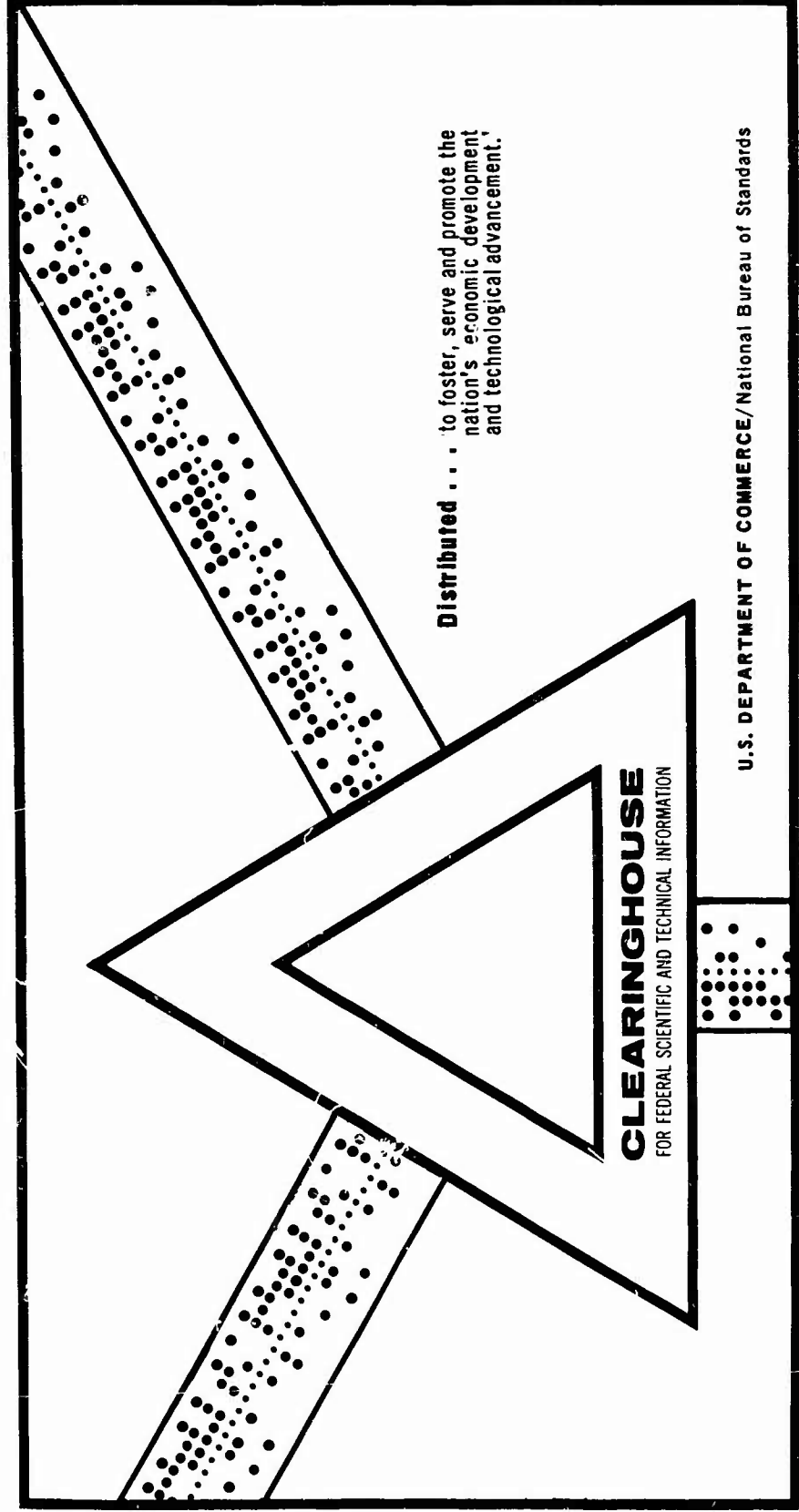
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CULTURAL ASPECTS OF CHINA'S "CULTURAL REVOLUTION"

John H. Weakland

Mental Research Institute  
Palo Alto, California

October 1969



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## SUMMARY

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution is probably the most important political development in China since the Communists came to power. Despite extensive news reports and repeated attempts at analysis from several standard viewpoints, much about it remains puzzling.

~~This report offers a new perspective,~~ <sup>second to the first,</sup> natural yet neglected. It examines the Cultural Revolution in cultural terms, focusing first on the explicitly "cultural" emphases of the movement, and then considering its possible relationships to Chinese culture, in the <sup>an</sup> broad anthropological sense, more generally.

Examination of the Maoist pronouncements about the movement makes clear that it focuses on education and on art and literature. Examination of the traditional Chinese use of "Chinese culture" shows that these same elements have been considered central to the shaping of proper social behavior and interaction, and therefore basic to political life also. The Cultural Revolution thus appears as re-emphasizing old means toward new socio-political goals.

The Red Guards, the educational revolution, and the revolution in drama are examined similarly, in more detail. Summing up, although both the proponents and opponents of the Cultural Revolution have emphasized its newness and novelty, it regularly displays reliance and even increased emphasis on traditional cultural patterns. The particular content involved, however, is often altered or inverted, or one side of an old pattern emphasized at the expense of the other side.

This last process seems fundamental to the origin and future of the Cultural Revolution. There has long been a polar distinction in Chinese culture - both in concept and social behavior - between idealistic concern with social goals and materialistic individual desires. This has been a basic emphasis and source of power in Chinese Communism from its outset, but the Cultural Revolution appears fundamentally as an attempt to achieve final revolutionary success by making this distinction absolute, with complete establishment of "public spirit" and

abolition of "personal desires." Both theoretically and practically, this goal is probably impossible to achieve, yet it may still provide a viable Maoist ideal for some time. The most likely alternative or eventual outcome is widespread collapse into apathy, corruption and disunity. Some synthesis between "public spirit" and "personal desires" would probably be most desirable both domestically and internationally, but this appears very unlikely in the circumstances.

## CULTURAL ASPECTS OF CHINA'S "CULTURAL REVOLUTION"

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## CULTURAL ASPECTS OF CHINE'S "CULTURAL REVOLUTION"

### I - INTRODUCTION

The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution has now been a major feature of the mainland China scene for more than three years. During this period a vast quantity of news and propaganda, comment, analysis, and speculation about this movement has appeared in Chinese Communist and outside sources. Yet the Cultural Revolution is still largely a Chinese puzzle to Westerners trying to comprehend Chinese politics. Basic questions persist unanswered, or have received conflicting answers: What in the political world is a "cultural revolution" anyway? More particularly, what are such striking and peculiar phenomena as literary purges, closing of all the schools, Red Guards who attack leading Communists, and extreme emphasis on The Thought of Mao all about this context? And lastly, why all this evident struggle - why should Mao promote a further revolution at this time, and especially why a "cultural" one? It is true that there are increasing signs, especially since this year's Ninth National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, that the Cultural Revolution may be drawing to a close or changing to a new and different stage. It remains important to improve our comprehension of its initial phases, as a basis for better understanding and anticipating whatever is yet to develop.

This report, however, does not purport to attempt the impossible. It does not aim to view or review the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution in its entirety. Rather, its aim is to clarify and interrelate some of the most important and puzzling aspects of the movement by re-examining them from a different general viewpoint. As already suggested, the basic difficulty in comprehending the Cultural Revolution is not inadequate data. Certainly some information that would be useful is unavailable but overall we already possess

a vast amount of data on the movement. The problem is more one of lacking an adequate framework for organizing and interpreting the available information appropriately and coherently. This evaluation broadly corresponds with that of Lifton: "Could it be.....that our ignorance has to do not so much with 'facts' alone as with our inability to make sense of the vast amount of information we do possess? What I am suggesting is that a good part of our ignorance is conceptual."\*

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\* Lifton, Robert Jay. Revolutionary Immortality: Mao Tse-tung and The Chinese Cultural Revolution. New York, Random House, 1968. pp. 3-4.

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The particular conceptual framework utilized here, however, is quite different from Lifton's. It involves a viewpoint which seems obvious, yet so far has been singularly neglected. Despite its very name, little attention has been paid to the cultural aspects of the Cultural Revolution, although there are two respects - closely related but not identical - in which such attention might promise enlightenment: 1) What are the implications for the movement of the Chinese connotations of the term "cultural"? 2) What can be discerned by examining the movement in relation to Chinese culture more generally, that is, from the standpoint of cultural anthropology?\*

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\*\* Technical Report No. 3 (January, 1968) on "The Thought of Mao Tse-tung" has already given attention to some aspects of the Cultural Revolution from a similar point of view, since these two movements have been so closely inter-related.

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## II - VIEWPOINTS ON THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

Since the cultural viewpoint is still uncommon in political studies, the nature of the present analysis will first be clarified by contrasting this approach with more usual ways of examining the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. The several questions originally posed about the movement will then be considered from this standpoint, in roughly the order stated.

First, journalists and various recent visitors to China have of course written many straight descriptive or news reports on the Cultural Revolution. Since our interest here is in analytic viewpoints and their differences, this class of writings needs little comment - except the cautionary note that actually even such reporting often involves some implicit interpretative stance, or at least the inherent cultural premises of the writer.

More conscious and deliberate interpretative accounts of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, while now numerous, have largely involved repeated recourse to a limited number of analytically distinguishable viewpoints. 1) Most prominent, as well as most obvious, is analysis in directly political terms. Several variants within this broad category are common: The Cultural Revolution has been viewed in terms of Chinese internal politics, especially in terms of power struggles, whether a personal one between Mao and Liu Shao-chi or more broadly between a radically idealistic - revolutionary faction of the Chinese Communists and a more moderate and pragmatic faction. The movement has also been viewed politically more in terms of external politics, with major emphases in some cases on China's deteriorating relations with the Soviet Union, and in others on Chinese fears of the United States. 2) Marxist interpretations of the Cultural Revolution are so important and distinctive that they deserve a category of their own, separate from ordinary political analyses. This category



would include both views by Marxists, and views by others in terms of Marxism and its developments. 3) Historical accounts, which may center either on relations of the Cultural Revolution to past features of Chinese history - such as the importance of the long guerrilla warfare period in Chinese Communism - or on historical developments in the world environment around Communist China. 4) Economic interpretations, which consider the influence of such factors as over-population, limited industry, and China's resulting need for rapid development in exacerbating different political views on how to industrialize, or which contrast the "poverty Communism" of China with the relatively well-off Soviet Union. 5) Religious-philosophical views, which stress factors ranging from veneration of Mao, to anti-individualism and the virtue of collective effort or even shared poverty.\* 6) Psychological

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\* E.g., Moravia, Alberto, The Red Book and The Great Wall: New York, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux; 1968.

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viewings: The theory of Mao's "senility" is only one variant of dismissing the whole problem by labeling the movement as crazy, so this needs further attention here. Other psychological views range from focusing on the envy and scheming of Mao's wife against Liu's to Lifton's emphasis on Mao's concern with immortality.\*\*

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\*\* Lifton, Robert J., op. cit.

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All of these descriptive and analytic viewpoints have some validity and relevance, and have contributed toward understanding various aspects of the Cultural Revolution. At the same time, however, these viewpoints are handi-

capped by several inherent and interrelated common features whose significance is not adequately recognized. They are all more or less specialized, they conceive political behavior almost wholly as conscious and calculated, and they are primarily external viewings, based on foreign rather than Chinese conceptions. Specialization necessarily involves some preselection of what is to be considered significant about the Cultural Revolution - and equally what is to be ignored. Some selectivity is necessary in analysis, but it carries potential dangers of being too narrow or being inappropriate to the object of study. Thus, the Cultural Revolution may be characterized as "just a power struggle". Certainly a power struggle is involved, but this restricted a view not only casts out many other potentially significant matters, but may easily lead to neglecting to examine sufficiently what sort of a power struggle is involved, how it is carried on, and about what issues. Or, a study may get so involved in arguing whether Mao's statements about the Cultural Revolution are really Marxist or not that what he says about the nature of this movement as such is lost in the shuffle. The dangers of selectivity are greater when the object of study, like the Cultural Revolution, is large, complex, obscure, and very foreign. In such a case, it is not safe merely to examine and interpret the observable phenomena of this movement from the outside, without considering also how events are significant, and how they fit together, in the thinking and behavior of the Chinese participants. It is also not adequate, however, to rely only on the Maoist picture of the Cultural Revolution. The point most relevant here is not that of doubtful reliability of Chinese Communist statements, nor of their unfamiliar concepts and phrasings, important as these are. Rather, it is that Mao's version of Marxist analysis is like the approaches of most other specialists in focusing too much on what is conscious, deliberate, and purposeful in political actions and events. Such analyses attempt to order

affairs in terms of too narrow and fixed a view of political behavior - one that sees only polar extremes of "rationality" and "craziness". They necessarily neglect all that is based on unconscious habits of action and premises of thought, although the influence of such factors on politics may be important, systematic, and discernable from the available data.

### III - "CULTURAL REVOLUTION" - WHAT ?

Totalitarian countries generally are concerned to order and control political language as well as overt political actions, and Communist regimes with their heavy emphasis on ideology and dogma are particularly occupied with officially choosing and prescribing correct and proper terms, phrases, and labels for use in political discourse. The rigidity of Soviet style, setting a remarkable standard of dreary monotony even in polemical diatribes, only attests to the dominance of correctness over all other considerations.\* Dif-

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\* Cf. Lipson, Leon, How to Argue in Soviet: Form and Use of Official Polemical Style, William Haas Memorial Lectures, Stanford University, 1969. (To be published by Stanford University Press)

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ficult as it may be to match this, even cursory examination of the Peking Review soon demonstrates that here as elsewhere the Chinese Communists do not intend to remain second to Moscow. In this sphere of language and terminology, moreover, their Communist motivations for correctness are reinforced by a traditional Chinese emphasis on the proper stylized use of language, especially in official or formal situations, and a general concern about the importance of names.

Against such a background it is not credible that the name of the Great

Proletarian Cultural Revolution (Wu-ch'an chieh-chi wen-hua ta ke-ming, in Chinese) was chosen casually and is without significance, yet the term itself has received little critical attention. Even here we will not be concerned at length with all of this title. In Communist usage "revolution" regularly is used to connote important change positively and powerfully, while the term "great" (ta) is commonly used by Chinese to emphasize the impressiveness of almost anything from personages and apartment houses to Leaps Forward. Since the movement was officially called the Great Socialist Cultural Revolution in a number of early documents, at least in translation, the change to "proletarian" which has now been standard for some time, arouses some curiosity but does not seem crucial. Perhaps "proletarian" adds more focus on the masses as against the bourgeois intellectuals and "revisionists", which would fit with other emphases developed in the movement.

The term "cultural", however, demands examination because it is both prominent and puzzling. To ordinary Western thinking, its use in the revolutionary context seems rather incongruous, and even on a more Marxist view this dominant emphasis on "culture" seems unorthodox. Examination of the Chinese Communists' own statements about the nature of the "Cultural Revolution" will be helpful here; this clarifies what sort of social factors "cultural" refers to overtly and specifically in this usage, and makes very plain the enormous emphasis the Chinese Communists have been placing on these factors. Yet in part this only serves to magnify and sharpen the underlying question: Why and how are these cultural matters so important to them? To deal with this, we must also consider the deeper, more general and less explicit connotations of the term "cultural" in Chinese usage.

### Explicit "Cultural" Aspects of the Cultural Revolution

Among all the vast outpouring of words on the Cultural Revolution, the initial statement by the Party's Central Committee probably remains most clear and concise:

The great proletarian cultural revolution now unfolding is a great revolution that touches people to their very souls and constitutes a new stage in the development of the socialist revolution in our country, a stage which is both broader and deeper.

At the Tenth Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee of the Party, Comrade Mao Tse-tung said: To over-throw a political power, it is always necessary first of all to create public opinion, to do work in the ideological sphere. This is true for the revolutionary class as well as for the counter-revolutionary class. This thesis of Comrade Mao Tse-tung's has been proved entirely correct in practice.

Although the bourgeoisie has been overthrown, it is still trying to use the old ideas, culture, customs and habits of the exploiting classes to corrupt the masses, capture their minds and endeavour to stage a come-back. The proletariat must do the exact opposite: it must meet head-on every challenge of the bourgeoisie in the ideological field and use the new ideas, culture, customs and habits of the proletariat to change the mental outlook of the whole of society. At present, our objective is to struggle against and overthrow those persons in authority who are taking the capitalist road, to criticize and repudiate the reactionary bourgeois academic "authorities" and the ideology of the bourgeoisie and all other exploiting classes and to transform education, literature and art and all other parts of the superstructure not in correspondence with the socialist economic base, so as to facilitate the consolidation and development of the socialist system.\*

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\* "Decision of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Concerning the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" (Adopted on August 8, 1966), p. 1. Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1966.

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That is, the Cultural Revolution is defined as a revolution in the ideological sphere which will change the mental outlook of the whole of society. This broad and profound change is stated as depending most explicitly on the transformation of education, and of literature and art.

There is much additional specific testimony to the central place ascribed to literature and art in this movement, which has largely persisted even while the Cultural Revolution has become more immediately concerned with Party purges and reforms. Thus it is reported that "Although the formation of the Red Guards in August, 1966 brought the Cultural Revolution to the notice of the world, its origin is dated earlier. According to the authoritative People's Daily (Jan. 1, 1967) the CR began with an instruction of Chairman Mao given in December, 1963 in which he criticized the lack of proletarian themes in art and literature"\*\*.

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\*\* Whitehead, Raymond L., "Three Years of Cultural Revolution", China Notes VI, No. 4, Autumn 1968 (New York, China Committee, National Council of Churches of Christ).

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Similar emphases on the primacy of literature and art appear repeatedly in a variety of forms. This forms the central theme in the lead article of the official pamphlet series on The Great Socialist Cultural Revolution in China, which concludes:

We must regard Chairman Mao's writings as our supreme guide, seriously study and grasp his teachings on literature and art, and pay special attention

to putting them into practice and creatively applying what we learn to our thinking and actions, so that we really master Mao Tse-tung's thought. .... An upsurge of the great socialist cultural revolution has taken shape and is now assuming the form of a mass movement. This great revolutionary tide will wash away the mire of all the old bourgeois ideas on literature and art and usher in a new epoch of socialist proletarian literature and art. Confronted with this excellent revolutionary situation, we should be proud to be thoroughgoing revolutionaries. Our socialist revolution is a revolution to eliminate the exploiting classes and all systems of exploitation once and for all and to root out all exploiting class ideas which are injurious to the people. We must have the confidence and courage to do things never previously attempted. We must raise still higher the great red banner of Mao Tse-tung's thought and, under the leadership of the Central Committee of the Party, Chairman Mao and the Military Commission, actively participate in the great socialist literature and art worthy of our great country, our great Party, our great people and our great army.\*

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\* "Hold High the Great Red Banner of Mao Tse-tung's Thought and Actively Participation in the Great Socialist Cultural Revolution", pp. 16-17 in The Great Socialist Cultural Revolution in China, No. 1, Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1966.

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Further, Mao's 25 year old statement on Problems of Art and Literature\*\* has

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\*\* Mao Tse-tung, Problems of Art and Literature. New York, International Publishers, 1950.

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been reprinted whole in the Peking Review of May 26, 1967, and cited over and over as a basic document for the Cultural Revolution.

More specifically, the Cultural Revolution has involved extensive critical attack on dramatic and other literary works (including many films) produced earlier in the Communist era. "The actual beginning of the Cultural Revolution most often given is the publication on November 10, 1965 in the Shanghai Wen Hui Pao of an article by Yao Wen-yuan criticizing the historical opera "Hai Jui's Dismissal"\*. Correspondingly, there has been much official

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\* China Notes, loc. cit.

Cf. also, among many similar references: Yao Wen-yuan, "On 'Three-Family Village'; The Reactionary Nature of 'Evening Chats at Yenshan' and 'Notes from Three-Family Village'", pp. 29-69 in The Great Socialist Cultural Revolution in China, op. cit.

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promotion and adulation of "Peking operas with contemporary revolutionary themes" and other "new revolutionary works" of literature, art and even music; this aspect of the movement is claimed to be headed by no less than Mao's wife, Chiang Ching.\*\* Finally, a significant proportion of the political attacks

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\*\* Cf., for example, "Summary of the Forum on the Work in Literature and Art in the Armed Forces With Which Comrade Lin Biao Entrusted Comrade Chiang Ching", Peking Review 10, No. 23, June 2, 1967, pp. 10-16.

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made on Mao's opponents during the Cultural Revolution, including Liu Shao-chi himself, have been based on charges that they promoted the "reactionary" kinds of art and literature. Whether such charges are fabricated or not, it is plain



that this basis was judged important.

Education is the other "cultural" sphere most stressed in the Cultural Revolution, ranking in importance with art and literature. Indeed, support of student activism, school officials, and demands for educational reform, culminating in closing down the whole school system, have constituted one of the most striking aspects of the whole movement. All this has been repeatedly described in Chinese and in Western reports at such length that further documentation here would merely be redundant.

The two major means proposed for cultural reform, both in education and in art and literature, are also quite plainly stated in the Chinese Communist sources. In both areas escape from the pseudo-expertise of bourgeoisie and foreign ideas is said to require, generally, intensive study and application of the thought of Mao Tse-tung, and more specifically, the combination of formal study with practical manual work among workers or peasants. In the later stages of the Cultural Revolution, its focus on promoting improvements in technology and productivity in industrial, agricultural, and professional work has also involved these same two emphases: study of the general principles stated by Mao, and learning to apply them to the specific and concrete needs encountered on immersion in a working social context. Two subsidiary but important means for promoting change - whether in education, art and literature, or technological work - are also emphasized: repeated exhortation to individual (but socially oriented) effort, and the holding up of model works or workers as examples to emulate.

Beyond these various specific foci, we may recall again that the stated general aim of the Cultural Revolution, in correspondence with the slogan "It is right to rebel", was to oppose the "Four Olds" - that is, "old ideas, culture, customs and habits" and to "use the new ideas culture, customs and

habits of the proletariat to change the mental outlook of the whole of society".\*

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\* "Decision of the Central Committee..." op.cit.

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Thus, when the statements of the actual proponents of the Cultural Revolution are surveyed and their several specific emphases are brought together, a reasonably clear set of ends and means is discernable: It is proposed that China's revolution has not yet been sufficiently carried out, that a cultural revolution is needed to produce a "new kind of men" with a "new world outlook". This revolution centers around reforming the cultural spheres of education and art and literature radically, by means of studying the Thought of Mao and learning, by persistence and effort in proletarian social contexts, to apply its truths; certain models show the way this is to be done. Indeed, all these points have been stated quite explicitly, and the overall picture might well be obvious but for two countering factors. Both the content and the expository style of the Maoist pronouncements are strange to us and, except perhaps for true believers, their very strident emphasis and endless repetition tends to stupefy or repel more than to enlighten.

Yet from a Western point of view, much still remains problematic or puzzling. Why is "culture" rated so important, and why are art and literature considered of such revolutionary significance?

The Cultural Revolution still appears similarly puzzling when viewed from a Marxist angle - after all "culture" is only part of the "superstructure". And when Schram\*\* analyzes the movement in terms of the status of Marxism,

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\*\* Schram, Stuart, "Social and Cultural Revolution in China", lecture delivered at Stanford University, April 3, 1969.

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especially in Asia, it is concluded that two main emphases of the Cultural Revolution also pose its main problems. One emphasis is on the education value of struggle, another is that change man's thinking can be changed by changing his experience. The Cultural Revolution apparently embodies the beliefs, contrary to orthodox Marxism, that practice leads to attitudes, even on an individual basis, and that ideas even determine reality.

#### IV - "CHINESE CULTURE" AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

To shed some new light on such nagging problems, let us next look at one obvious potential context of this Maoist "cultural" emphasis, namely the meaning of "culture", and its relations to behavior and attitudes, in traditional Chinese thinking. That is, we now begin explicitly to consider the particular Chinese conception of "culture", and its possible significance for the Cultural Revolution, in terms of the broader and more general cultural viewpoint described earlier as the basic analytic stance of this study.

In an anthropologically-oriented study of China made some years ago\*,

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\* Columbia University Research in Contemporary Cultures (Chinese group), sponsored by the Office of Naval Research (Contract N6 ONR-271)

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it was repeatedly noted that when Chinese informants were interviewed they frequently referred to "Chinese culture" both in characterizing the nature of behavior being discussed and in explaining its occurrence. It gradually became apparent that for Chinese generally, "Chinese culture" meant an overall system of being and behavior which both defined and explained their ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. In every human society, of course, there is some more or less explicit ideology of the nature of man and his place in the

social and physical universe, together with related ideas about the bases of human behavior and social relationships. Such conceptions vary widely, however, and the two levels involved also may be closely related or seen as rather separate. Thus one traditional society may view its ways as simply existing naturally, as the only ways, while another may see them as representing ancestral tradition to be practiced and handed on. Or, among modern societies, the French may emphasize "logic" as the basis of their civilisation, while the Americans see science, technology, and private enterprise as foundations of "the American way of life".

The particular notion of "Chinese culture", however, is distinctive in several respects. First, to an unusual degree it is a conscious and explicitly formulated conception, often referred to and readily described at some length. Second, it focuses primarily on human behavior and social relationships - it is mainly a social ideology. In particular, "Chinese culture" includes the specification of normative standards of correct social behavior, although in the traditional Chinese view these models largely are presented simply as the only correct and proper ways. Anything else is ignorance, error, or barbarism, and therefore not to be taken seriously, even though it may have to be dealt with practically. Finally, the concept of "Chinese culture" interweaves ideas about the nature and importance of correct personal and social behavior, involving heavy emphasis on selfless subordination of the individual to the interests of his social group (traditionally mainly the family), with ideas about the bases of such behavior - both its sources and its functioning. The relationships between content and bases, however, is complex and almost paradoxical, mingling ideas of the natural and unique correctness of such behavior with ideas of the learning and effort needed to actualize it in social life.

Some concrete examples will aid in making the points just summarized more clear and vivid. One Chinese informant long resident in the United States was asked about her repeated explanations of behavior unusual to Americans in terms

of "It's just Chinese culture". She replied, "The thought that comes to my mind is 'If that's the way it was, that's the way it's going to be'. It worked out before, why should we change it? The behavior pattern already established - desirable and acceptable ... Chinese culture means that's the Chinese way of doing it. I've been doing it that way ever since I was born - how can you overthrow?" But "ever since I was born" is not to be taken so literally as to mean that Chinese behavior is simply taken for granted or assigned to "human nature". The situation is more complex and contradictory. On the one hand "that's just the way things are" - at least in Chinese culture, which is all that really matters - yet one must learn that that's the way things are, and is not really born with this view of the world and the corresponding behavior. The interviewer knew that while "Chinese culture" is seen as coherent, logical and correct, small children are not believed capable of "understanding reason" for some years, and are thus exempted from many standards. Therefore the same informant was asked specifically if her "Chinese culture" really was inborn, or was learned. She said "First you learn through the immediate family, then later with reading, and elders telling you it's the way to follow". "What about the poor and illiterate? Do they learn, and how?" "From their landlord, or successful past generations, family ethics and goals." "You don't have to read the classics, then?" "No, learn from people all around you." That is, "Chinese culture" is the only logical and realistic set of social ideas and rules of behavior, yet it still must be learned.

Moreover, this learning itself involves a complex process. As the informant's statements imply, it initially is based on informal acquisition of the standards of one's social group or milieu, with the learner somewhat passively responding to the example, or the prescriptions, of elders and superiors. This aspect is also emphasized in the famous and often-quoted story of how the mother of the sage Mencius moved three times during his youth, so that her son would grow up surrounded by a proper social environment of virtue and wisdom. Yet the same

informant's account also mentions reading, and indeed, although it seems quite probable that early social influence is basic, and that even Chinese peasants learn the most fundamental standards of "Chinese culture" adequately, the Chinese ideal and expectation has always been that formal education should especially contribute to one's becoming a model of "Chinese culture".

This of course is consonant with the general conception of "Chinese culture" as a learned rather than innate system of thought and behavior, even though it was also conceived as essentially the only right and reasonable human way. Two aspects of this matter of education are particularly important here. First, Chinese formal education, as well as informal social influence and learning, traditionally emphasized moral more than practical or technical training, to a degree it is difficult for Westerners to apprehend. The Chinese view, in effect, proposed that if correct social attitudes and relationships were instilled, proper handling of any more specific and pragmatic affairs of life would naturally and almost necessarily follow. Consequently, in the educational sphere the chief purpose of literacy was to enable people to study the Chinese classics and these, whether philosophical, historical, or poetical works, emphasized the nature and importance of proper individual behavior and social interaction. Indeed, such moral emphases were prominent from the earliest school lessons all the way through the highest imperial examinations. Chinese culture in the broader sense has always had a great literary emphasis, but the literature involved was a highly moral one. "The Master [Confucius] said, 'In the Book of Poetry are three hundred pieces, but the design of them all may be embraced in one sentence - "Having no depraved thoughts."'" \*

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\* Confucian Analects, Book II, Ch. II, in The Four Books, tr. by James Legge. Shanghai, The Commercial Press, n.d.

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Even the popular stories and dramas which were the main literature of the ordinary population shared this same moral emphasis. Both these points are still reflected simply in another informant's response to the question "If a Chinese says 'Chinese

culture' to you, what do you think of?" "Like in our Chinese Club's discussions - the morals, ethics, righteousness, all that. We want to show movies [films from Taiwan] to spread this - our conscientiousness."

Second, although "Chinese culture" may in part be acquired by natural response to prevailing social contexts - either by direct copying of models or conversely by responding in complementary way to others' social roles - deliberate individual effort is also emphasized. While this emphasis also appears in social exhortations to actively practice proper behavior, it is particularly apparent in formal education. In fact, quickness and facility in learning are apt to be suspect as superficial; informants emphasize that reliable learning requires active, persistent, and prolonged individual application of effort until eventually what is presented and practiced becomes thoroughly internalized. This orientation too has been prominent and explicit at least ever since Confucius: "The Master said, 'At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning. At thirty, I stood firm. At forty, I had no doubts. At fifty, I knew the decrees of Heaven. At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth. At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right.'""

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\* Confucian Analects, Book II, ch. IV.

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Here the Master's emphasis on the necessity of unremitting self-disciplined effort in study of the classics, and its value toward the Confucian goal of transforming oneself into a "superior man", stands out as strikingly parallel with the emphasis of the Cultural Revolution on protracted daily study of the Thoughts of Mao (which in fact are referred to in a work by Japanese newsmen as the "Mao Analects"\*\*), in order by this and other sustained efforts to become a really

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\*\* Yomiuri Shimbun staff, This is Communist China, ed. by Robert Trumbull. New York, David McKay, 1968.

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"steeled and tempered" revolutionary - that is, one who can whole-heartedly and unwaveringly do what is right, now according to the Maoist vision. In fact, if the main points about "Chinese culture" are reviewed, it appears that point by point there are equivalent emphases in the Cultural Revolution. For both there is a great emphasis on an explicit social ideology which is stated via a combination of extremely general principles and extremely specific and concrete incidents seen as exemplifying the broadest principles - as in Mao's retelling of the old story of "The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains"\* to convey that no task

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\* Mao Tse-tung The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains. Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1965. (One of the Cultural Revolution's "Three Constantly Read Articles".)

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is beyond the united and persistent effort of the people. Both ideologies are primarily concerned with defining moral standards for proper social behavior, and especially with upholding social concerns above self-interest - in the traditional case concern about the family, in the Maoist case about "the people" and society at large. And correspondingly, both show little direct concern about practical or technical matters. Formerly, if one internalized the Confucian system thoroughly, he was not considered to need specific training to handle his complex official administrative tasks; today, once armed with the Thought of Mao, the problems of production, technology, and science can be handled readily as they are encountered. The way prescribed by the Cultural Revolution now is the only way, just as "Chinese culture" was the only way before. Yet both these "only ways" require learning, in part from social models and in part by the study of their classical texts and response to specific authoritative pronouncements. And, then and now, this learning requires prolonged and concentrated individual effort, plus the practice of correct behavior in appropriate social contexts.

Such similarities may well be difficult to accept. Many people attached to



the China of former days (both Chinese and Westerners) are extremely reluctant to see Communist China as still Chinese in any significant way. Meanwhile, those concerned with Marxism arrive at the same stance of rejection of any such relationship from the opposite pole - because of unwillingness to believe that largely unconscious cultural influence could be as important in a Communist country as conscious ideology. Rather similarly, the Maoists themselves of course insist on the total newness of the Cultural Revolution and deny any connection with the traditional culture. And even apart from such powerful emotional factors, there are two other serious obstacles to recognizing the basic similarities described. First, the areas of fundamental formal similarity between the Cultural Revolution and more traditional Chinese culture are themselves often hard to recognize because these areas now are explicitly stressed far more than before. Formerly, for every individual a whole lifetime was available for the inculcation of an ancient and pervasive ongoing system. The Cultural Revolution, in attempting to inculcate its new revision of this system very rapidly, emphasizes the basic means and ends involved far more intensively than before, and also more exclusively - that is, certain other counter-balancing emphases of the traditional system are now ignored, denied, or attacked. Second, at the level of specific and manifest content, there are of course many sizeable and significant differences, even diametric oppositions, between the new Maoist culture and the old. Even here, however, not all is new; the tricky question of what is new and what is old will receive more attention later.

These differences of extreme emphasis and of content between traditional "Chinese culture" and the Cultural Revolution tend to form its most prominent and striking features and such factors also certainly are of great immediate moment to those directly involved in Chinese political events. Our own situation, however, provides a relative distance and detachment from immediate immersion in Chinese events. It is important to take advantage of this by maintaining a broad

and long-range view of Chinese politics, in which immediate problems and explicit but partial characterizations of situations will not be allowed to overshadow and obscure the underlying structure and premises of important developments.

In short, it is here proposed that the Cultural Revolution can be understood most accurately and comprehensively by viewing it as a new and quite paradoxical variation on the old theme of "Chinese culture". That is, except that the Chinese discriminate between ends and means less sharply than Western cultures, the Cultural Revolution appears as Mao's attempt to formulate a radically new overall schema of proper Chinese thought and behavior, which nevertheless corresponds in many fundamental emphases and aims to traditional schemas, and to inculcate this in the Chinese population by extreme use of means which also parallel traditional ones in fundamental respects.

#### V - SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION

The foregoing depiction of the Cultural Revolution has concentrated on its main outlines as seen from a cultural viewpoint. A rather more focused and extended look will now be taken at several particularly striking aspects of the movement, to flesh out the basic outline while illustrating the use of this analytic viewpoint somewhat more specifically and concretely.

##### The Red Guards

As the strange vanguard leading the early stages of the Cultural Revolution and symbolizing its special nature,\* the Red Guards certainly demand special

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\* "At first, the Cultural Revolution had much in common with earlier purification campaigns. It began to change character when the young people were exhorted to take an active part in it, and soon it became more and more a young people's revolution". Hans Granqvist, The Red Guard: A Report on Mao's Revolution, p. 86. New York, Praeger, 1967.

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attention, even though they have since been demoted and the working class and People's Liberation Army given greater emphasis.\* It still seems outlandish and

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\* Cf. Whitehead, Raymond L. "Three Years of Cultural Revolution," China Notes VI, No. 4, 1-3, August 1968 (New York, National Council of Churches of Christ).

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unprecedented that a significant revolutionary movement could be composed mainly of teen-age students, and that such a movement would attack, successfully, major authority figures in a revolutionary Communist government.

In this area, despite the enormous publicity the Red Guards have received, one would like to have more, and a different kind of, data. If, instead of "documentaries" showing Mao receiving the first million Red Guards in Tien An Men Square, the second million, the third million, and so on, there existed a fictional film on the Red Guards providing some story line and concrete images of behavior, this would help to get beyond the endless sterotypy of their marches and demonstrations, their songs and slogans praising the importance and infallibility of Chairman Mao and his thoughts. Even in the absence of such aid, however, it is possible to clarify the nature of the Red Guards by first describing the major patterns of the movement, and then searching for possible parallels or predecessors in Chinese culture.

It is of course very evident that the Red Guards represent a mass uprising of the young against their elders in authority, and not just individually and personally - though many individuals were certainly subjected to personal vilification and attack - but against the general bases of the authority of their elite positions, as earlier in the Chinese Revolution the status and power of the rural gentry was attacked generally through public humiliation of many individual landlords. Red Guard attacks, although they also involved those believed to show "Western" or "imperialist" influence, centered on two main targets: First the academic intellectuals, and second the "revisionist" leaders in the government

and Chinese Communist Party. These groups clearly are the present-day equivalents of the traditional authority and prestige groups, the scholars and the officials, in addition to representing the traditional status of age above youth in general\*. Against such traditional standards, and also the fact that

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\* Although the point is not new, since the Chinese situation far exceeded common Western experience it can hardly be emphasized enough how high and privileged the position of Chinese authority figures has customarily been - and how much they took this for granted.

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these were new authorities approved by a Communist government, the students rose under the slogan "Revolution is not wrong; it is right to rebel."\*\*

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\*\* Whitehead, op. cit.

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All this, in fact, is so obvious that two other pieces of the pattern are often lost sight of, or viewed rather separately, instead of conjointly. These "rebels" basically were not rebelling on their own, either individually or en masse. Rather, they were acting under a higher authority, that of Chairman Mao. For example it has been reported that Nieh Yuan-tzu, a heroine of the Cultural Revolution for putting up the first wall poster at Peking University criticizing its president, acted at the secret instruction of Mao himself.\*\*\* Whether this

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\*\*\* Yomiuri Shimbun staff, op. cit., pp. 73-4.

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is certain or not, it is quite certain that as the Cultural Revolution went on, Mao both publicly sanctioned the Red Guards in general, and issued specific orders to regulate their activities.\*\*\*\* And in any event, even when their behavior

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\*\*\*\* See, for example, Neale Hunter, "The Rebel Boys: The Red Guard and Shanghai's Cultural Revolution", China Notes VI, No.2, April 1968, pp. 3-6.

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was most confusing or contradictory, the Red Guards always saw themselves as acting on behalf of Mao and his thoughts - they were under the guidance of the "little red books" they read and waved so much. And quite in consonance with this, despite their excesses, their strong attacks on old rules and standards, and perhaps some of their dreams, their movement was always basically directed toward a replacement of the old rules and the authority of intellectuals and officials with new rules and authority - Mao plus "the masses"; a new social conformity and subordination rather than greater equality and freedom.

The Red Guard movement would not appear so striking if there existed any clear and direct parallels to the pattern described. Yet if we look for less direct and total correspondence, in various possible areas - historical and contemporary times, familial as well as educational and political settings - some informative partial parallels are discernable.

In the first place, political activism as such among the young is not new in China, and especially in Chinese Communism. Indeed, as Schwartz\* notes, "Such phrases as 'little generals' and 'Red Guards' themselves refer back to the charming waifs who were attached to the Red Army during the old guerilla days and who served that army with selfless devotion",\* and the prominence of young people as

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\* Schwartz, Benjamin I., Communism and China: Ideology in Flux. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1968. p.226.

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organizers and administrators during the period of "Liberation" of the mainland from 1945 to 1949 was widely remarked. In addition to such factual examples, Chinese Communist films such as The Letter With Feathers, Song of Youth, and The Red Lantern have often featured children and young people engaged in heroic guerrilla activity or political struggles. In such stories, young heroines have been especially prominent, and such depiction closely parallels much older Chinese

stories of young heroines fighting in the service of their country.\*

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\* Cf. Weakland, John H., "Chinese Communist Images of Invasion and Resistance", Technical Report No. 4, ONR Contract No. N00014-66-C0310.

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The element of rebellion against high authority justified by reference to even higher authority - especially some form of supreme authority - is also evident in the Chinese past, in several forms. The famous novel All Men Are Brothers (Shui Hu Chuan), a boyhood favorite of Mao's, concerns a band of outlaws who are in open rebellion against officialdom which, like the Red Guards, they see as corrupt, but meanwhile are convinced that the Emperor would approve the justice of their cause if only he could be accurately informed of it. And even when rebellion has been directed at the Emperor himself, this too has involved the tacit approval of still higher authority - rebellion is right because suffering and disasters have signified that the Emperor no longer possesses the Mandate of Heaven.

Even before Mao himself became elevated to a position somewhere near Heaven, supernatural sanction has also been invoked, at least fictionally and implicitly, to justify and support the rebellion of youth against traditional authority. Thus, in such Communist films as The Scholar and the Fairy Carp and Liang Shan-Po and Chu Ying-tai (both fairly faithful retellings of traditional Chinese stories) we see the higher authority of supernatural intervention finally enable the pure love of rebellious young people to overcome the repressive, corrupt authority of the materialistic, "feudalistic family."\*\* Since in China the family system

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\*\* Cf. Weakland, John H., "Conflict Between Love and Family Relationships in Chinese Films", Technical Report No. 2, ONR contract No. N00014-66-C0310.

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has long been central to everything - "the country is like a big family" even, as one informant put it - the possible parallels of family and political authority and rebellion may be pursued further yet. It is well known that under

Communism children have been encouraged to inform politically on their parents - in the service of the now higher authority of the nation and the Party, which could now be conceived as the "elders" of the new "big family" that is China. But who is who in family terms among the Red Guards, the established academic and governmental authorities, and Mao himself? In seeking an answer to this question, we may profitably examine the most famous and classic tale of the Chinese big family, Dream of the Red Chamber. The Communist film version of this story generally parallels the original novel, except that in it the young hero, Pao-yu, is clearly upheld as a symbol of youth rebelling against traditional but corrupt family authority, where formerly it was ambiguous whether he was heroic or weak and irresponsible\*. For the present problem the most signifi-

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\* For example, in the opinion of an informant with whom this matter was discussed, "Pao-yu was spoiled rotten, just like those Red Guards."

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cant feature of the story is that when Pao-yu's father, as supposedly the responsible head of the family, attempts to discipline the boy, his order is countermanded and he himself is severely censured by the old grandmother - who thus stands forth as the really supreme authority in the family. That this example of a grandmother's power and her protective alliance with a grandchild is fictional and famous does not mean that it is untrue or atypical. Such grandmothers are stock figures of the Chinese stage (where physically they rather resemble the aging Mao). Regardless of their age or physical condition, they are always morally powerful and personally determined, especially in situations of crisis. Such grandmothers, however, also are common in actual daily life, and there are fundamental cultural bases for this. First, the very Chinese emphasis on the authority and respect due to age gives a status advantage to grandparents over their children even when these are grown and actively managing a household, and this is especially important for women, whose family position is low at marriage



but increases as the family increasingly is composed of their issue.\* Second,

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\* Cf. Weakland, "Images of Invasion and Resistance", op. cit., pp. 23-28.

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Chinese culture traditionally has involved considerable conflict between members of adjacent generations (probably related to the great emphasis on parental authority), and corresponding tendencies toward identification or alliance between generations one step removed, such as grandparents and grandchildren. Thus, although the analogy might seem far-fetched at first glance, viewing Mao as the indomitable old "grandmother" of all China, joined with a horde of grandchildren in a moralistic yet idealistic crusade against a middle-aged "parental" group accused of selling out the big family for personal and materialistic ends, provides a conceptual framework that is consonant with basic cultural patterns while it coherently integrates much of our previously confusing information on the Red Guard movement. While suggesting the utility of such a viewing, however, it should be noted that any such alliances of grandparent and grandchild also are apt to be unequal and incomplete. Hunter describes the bewilderment and dismay of a group of Shanghai Red Guards who were left holding "incorrect" positions as shifting directives arrived from Peking.\*\* And currently, many

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\*\* Op. cit.

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Red Guards are being "instructed to go to the rural areas and show their enthusiasm by joining in productive labor" instead of demonstrating and writing big-character posters, while by a symbolic gift of mangoes from Mao to a Workers' Mao-thought Propaganda Team, "the revolutionary mantle shifted from the Red Guards to the workers"\*\*\*. Even Pao-yu was separated from his careless freedom

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\*\*\* Whitehead, loc. cit.

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and true love when grandmother herself decided it was time for him to assume practical family responsibilities by marrying a proper wife of her choosing.

### The Educational Revolution

There is of course considerable overlap - or better, interpenetration - between this aspect of the Cultural Revolution and the Red Guards, since these were mostly students, rebelling in large part against the educational system and its authorities. Indeed, this overlap of persons, activities, and aims indicates further how much, despite its often chaotic appearance, the Cultural Revolution possessed a unity of structure and functioning. However, others besides the Red Guards have been concerned in the educational reform, and it has involved emphases not adequately covered above.

The Cultural Revolution's "struggle-criticism - transformation" program for the educational system has centered around charges that Chinese education, under the influence of "persons in authority taking the capitalist road" was becoming bourgeois and revisionist rather than communist and revolutionary.\*

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\* The development and characteristics of the Educational Revolution up to 1967 are surveyed well from a conservative academic viewpoint in C.T. Hu, "Target of the Cultural Revolution", Saturday Review, August 19, 1967.

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Thus, as one factor, the school administrators and faculty members were claimed to be academic intellectuals with strong remnants of bourgeois revisionist ideology which was correspondingly emphasized in their teaching, examinations, and administrative policies. As another, the dominant position of such people and their system was claimed to selectively favor the admission and success of students with similar bourgeois background and inclinations, while discriminating against the children of workers and peasants, further reinforcing the bourgeois character of the system. Therefore the Maoists considered a radical overthrow and transformation of the whole educational system necessary, played up the

protests of radical students, and incited the students to criticize their teachers and rebel against their authority. Eventually the entire Chinese school system was closed down for more than a year, then restarted on a new basis. Our aim here is to examine the main criticisms of the former system, the background of these attacks, and the major premises of the new educational proposals.

Attacks on the bourgeois ideology and practices of the Chinese school authorities have centered around four main claims: 1) These schoolmen were authoritarian and bureaucratic, disregarding the wisdom of the masses and Mao as well as the views of their students. 2) They displayed "individualism", being more concerned about their own privileges and status than about social needs. 3) They were highly academic intellectuals, valuing extensive and prolonged book learning, and scorning practical experience and learning through doing. 4) They overvalued and emulated Western accomplishments and knowledge and downgraded Chinese achievements and capabilities. And, of course, they acted by example and instruction to inculcate all these errors into their students.

It is only realistic to note first that there were considerable grounds for such criticism and concerns. Chinese education has always been both highly authoritarian and bookish, and it would be hardly conceivable that this had suddenly ceased under Communist rule. The somewhat secondary charge of stressing "foreign" knowledge is probably compounded from two sources. Many if not most upper-level Chinese educators have studied abroad and their views still reflect some acknowledgement of the scientific-technological superiority of the West, while Maoist China has been growing increasingly xenophobic and overly concerned to insist on Chinese superiority in everything. As for the "individualism" of the intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution's demands for selflessness very generally are extreme, but this is not the whole story. In China the position of the intellectual, who also was traditionally associated with official position and power, has commonly been accorded status and material privilege to a degree it is hard for

us to imagine. Moreover, there were strong tendencies for these intellectuals to take their status and privileges for granted, as a matter of natural right or simply a proper recognition of their superiority. It appears that such privileges and such views still persisted under the Communists right up to the Cultural Revolution. For example, there is the account by Ma Sitson, concert violinist and president of the Central Music Academy, of his escape from China after being attacked by the Red Guards in the early part of the Cultural Revolution. Ma himself states that his position since 1954 was that of a figurehead, "a purely ornamental role as head of the college", but it continued to provide him with most of the old privileges of scholarly status: a comfortable income and "a fine old Peking house", a car and chauffeur, and a cook. All this was in a poor and Communist country, yet when students put up posters criticizing his music as bourgeois and saying "that my family lived too comfortable a life - 'in a fairy-tale grotto far from the world'", Ma apparently was unable to see any basis whatever for this charge, or for envy and hostility toward him.\* (This,

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\* Ma Sitson, "Terror at the Hands of the Red Guard", Life 62, No.2, June 2, 1967.

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of course, is not to deny that these students may also have been incited by higher Maoists, nor to claim their subsequent more extreme attacks were justified.)

In seeking to understand the bases of the educational revolution's scope and strength, two more general factors also need consideration. First, there can be little doubt that from a Maoist viewpoint, the "vicious-circle" characteristic of the educational system is quite accurate. Homeostatic self-perpetuation is in the nature of all ongoing social organizations, even when their overt goal is much less one of selection and indoctrination than is the case in educational systems. Second, this whole matter is of unusual weight in Chinese society because education both in theory and fact, is of such prime importance. In China, higher education in particular has always been available only to relatively few,

yet an almost essential requisite for elite status and power; it retains a similar role even now. And more broadly, as described earlier, in China education in general is seen as the major basis not only of knowledge but also of character and social behavior, and thus of political life also.

Looking at its more immediate background, the educational revolution - like several other important features of the Cultural Revolution - may be seen as an outgrowth of the "red versus expert" controversy concerning the relative importance of and relations between ideological correctness and specialized technical knowledge, of whatever kind.\* Taken broadly, this problem has probably been

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\* Cf. Hu, op. cit.

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endemic in Chinese Communism throughout its history. Such an issue, for example, necessarily was implicitly involved in Mao's original coming to power in the 1930's, when his political-military theory of making revolution from rural bases gained him precedence over those more expert in orthodox Marxism, in labor organization, and in military affairs.\*\* Since the Communists achieved power nationally, this

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\*\* Significantly, similar issues are implicit in famous old Chinese novels such as The Romance of the Three Kingdoms and All Men Are Brothers, in which they are resolved by acknowledgement of the leadership of scholar-strategists over military professionals - that is, of an old analog of "redness" over "expertness."

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issue has become increasingly more overt and prominent. The primary importance of "redness" has usually been upheld, although there was a period of emphasis on "expertness" during several years immediately preceding the Cultural Revolution. For some time the dominant theme was that of "redness and expertness", that the two could be combined readily enough, perhaps with some re-education of those involved. Thus in the 1959 film, New Story of an Old Soldier, an ex-soldier sent by the Party to establish new wheat lands in Manchuria finds that he needs to add some

agricultural knowledge to his political loyalty - though not so much as the academic agriculturalist sent to advise him needs to learn from him about united effort of the people overcoming all obstacles. By the mid-1960's, however, there appeared increasing concern about a polarization of "red versus expert", in which experts of various kinds - technical, intellectual, and administrative - were seen as disregarding or even opposing the need for correct political views as the essential basis for effective work. Correspondingly, the theme of increasing calls for further political "re-education" of such experts has been sounded, with variations, ever since. In the early part of the Cultural Revolution there was more attack on the experts to put them down; recently, there is growing discussion of their amenability to re-education and reacceptance into the fold after becoming red enough. But since the rise of the Thought of Mao movement, there has also been much development of a rather new and different emphasis. This is the claim that redness in itself gives birth to a kind of expertness, an expertness which is broadly creative yet immediately practical, in contrast to the narrow, specialized, formal, and often foreign character of the old expertness.\* The "redness"

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\* Cf. Weakland, "The Thought of Mao Tse-tung....," op. cit., pp. 28ff., for a more extended discussion of this development, the apparently wild claims it involves, and their possible partial validity.

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required to give rise to this sort of expertness, however, involves more than just adherence to Marxist ideology. It repeatedly is plainly described as a compound comprising intensive study of the works of Mao and creative application of their principles to the problems met in an actual work situation, with a spirit of selfless determination to serve the people and overcome all obstacles.

Against the foregoing background, we can now summarize some central points about the Educational Revolution. First, in its similar emphasis on the Thought of Mao, the combination of work and study, and selfless service to society, it appears from its positive goals as one aspect of the extreme focus on "redness"

versus "expertness", in the special area of education. (This area, though, has become much less separate and specialized than formerly by the very nature of this broader development, in which not only educational institutions but the army, factories, and communes also are supposed to become "great schools of Mao Thought".) On the critical side, we have seen that the educational revolution involves great concentration and attack on several problems of the educational system - autocratic authority, bookishness, status and privileges - that do exist, but are also deeply imbedded in the traditional culture, partly as a reflection of the extreme importance of education in Chinese society.

The changes proposed by the educational revolution are correspondingly extreme, and its aims utopian - yet for the most part when carefully examined they do not represent any fundamentally new organization of the system, and certainly not any further development toward either Soviet or liberal Western education. Rather they usually involve either inversions of the features attacked, leaving the basic pattern unchanged, or selective emphasis favoring certain traditional educational themes as against others. Thus, although there has been some talk of "self study and free discussion, requiring only nominal supervision by the faculty",\* it already seems clear that the students will be free only to apply

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\* Hu, op, cit.

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themselves to the Thought of Mao and labor projects. The authority of the academic intellectuals is attacked only to be replaced by that of the masses, and above all Mao. The workers and peasants are now to be recognized as by definition inherently superior to the intellectuals, instead of the reverse. This inversion may also involve some reversion, since the authority of the intellectuals was probably less total; their traditional power and pedantry had been repeatedly criticized even in old China\*\*, and in modern times under the influence of Western education

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\*\* Cf., for example, Wu Ching-tzu, The Scholars Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1957 (written about 1750).

and science they were gradually becoming more liberal and less authoritarian even before the Communists took over. The works of Mao meanwhile are to take up the role of universal guidance and unquestionable authority formerly occupied by the Confucian classics (and perhaps partially gained in the interim by textbooks along more Western lines). Despite their great differences in specific doctrine, the new devoted students of Mao Thought are more the heirs of the old scholars who strove to memorize and live by the Chinese classics than are the modern Chinese intellectuals occupied with increasingly specific and technical studies. Finally, strange as it may seem, "redness" appears as the Communist parallel to the Confucian "superior man" in important respects. Both point to the man so trained in general moral and social principles that he is seen as best fitted to carry out the important practical tasks of his society selflessly and well, although the principles involved and the tasks envisioned are often so different. The educational revolution's emphasis on the explicit combining of work almost equally with study, in order to learn how to apply the general principles of the canonical books to concrete problems, is new specifically. Yet even in the old days the scholar had to descend from his mountain study into actual struggles to become a strategist, and the first official posts of the graduates of the imperial examinations must have involved much "on-the-job" learning. The relevant social context for such learning formerly was in the company of scholars and officials; now it is among the workers and peasants. Overall, then, the basic educational premises and the status of students resulting from the educational revolution appears to represent a return toward the traditional Chinese model in form though not in content, a somewhat reactionary attempt at cultural revitalization, rather than any progressive change.

#### The Revolution in Drama

The Cultural Revolution has placed great emphasis on revolution in the field of drama, criticizing many former Chinese Communist productions, appointing Mao's



wife, Chiang Ching, to lead reforms in this field, and announcing the production of several "new revolutionary dramatic works" with great official fanfare. Also, this area is related to our general concern with films as a basic source of data on Chinese Communism. It is therefore particularly appropriate to look at the revolution in drama specifically but briefly, as one major representative of the whole area of "art and literature" so greatly emphasized in the Cultural Revolution.

Not only did the Cultural Revolution in the area of drama begin as usual with criticism, but criticism of the play Hai Jui Dismissed from Office "on November 10, 1965 is now regarded as the start of the cultural revolution"\*. There

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\* Goodman, Merle, "The Fall of Chou Yang", China Quarterly, July - Sept. 1966, 132-148.

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has since been a great outpouring of further criticism, both of stage works and films. According to the available materials\*\* this political criticism, somewhat

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\*\* These include: Keng Chieh, "Movie Industry of Communist China under the Impact of the Great Cultural Revolution", China Monthly #46, January 1, 1968 (Union Research Institute, Hong Kong); articles from the Film Battle News (Tien Ying Chen Pao), a Canton Red Guards paper of December 1967, obtained through the Universities Service Center of Hong Kong; various pieces in Peking Review from 1966-1968; and the discussion in Goldman, op. cit.

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like the artistic criticism of Western writers on films and drama, is long on evaluation and polemics but very short on descriptive content. That is, the volume and strength of these critical attacks attests again to the importance ascribed to literature generally, but they often do not even refer to any specific dramatic works, and even when they do there is not much specification of the content that the criticism supposedly relates to. There are some minor exceptions to this. A few works have been criticized, probably accurately, as veiled attacks



on the Party leadership.\* Also, there have been complaints that films, and es-

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\* Goldman, op. cit., p. 141.

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pecially Peking operas, feature emperors, officials, and court ladies as characters and love and intrigue as themes, while neglecting or "disfiguring" the common people and revolutionary themes; these overly-concrete criticisms, like much else in the revolution in art and literature, merely reiterate Mao's 25-year-old remarks at the Yenan Forum on Literature and Art. In addition a few dramas depicting exceptional cases of "good" officials or merchants of former times have been severely attacked on the extremist basis that such tolerance involves sympathizing with class enemies instead of upholding the class struggle. For the most part, however, the criticisms of dramatic works simply raise the usual general Cultural Revolution charges of individualism, revisionism and bourgeois values, and use these strongly to attack Liu Shao-chi and his associates for allegedly promoting such evil works.

Any detailed analysis relating criticisms of drama to their targets is thus hardly possible. However, the "new revolutionary dramatic works" produced by the Cultural Revolution offer a rare opportunity to examine some concrete evidence on what this movement promotes positively. By mid-1968, there were eight officially-recognized "model theatrical works created on contemporary revolutionary themes," namely "the Peking operas Taking the Bandit's Stronghold, On the Docks, The Red Lantern, Shachiapang, Raid on the White Tiger Regiment; the ballets The Red Detachment of Women and The White-Haired Girl and the symphonic work Shachiapang."\*\* Four of these new Peking operas (all except On the Docks) are available

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\*\* Peking Review No. 1, 1968, p.46.

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as play books with photographic illustrations, and have been examined. In addition, film versions have been seen of The Red Lantern\*\*\* and of The East is Red,

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\*\*\* This film has been discussed at some length in "Chinese Communist Images of Invasion and Resistance", op. cit.

a dramatized history of the Chinese Communist movement also partially based on the Peking opera style. Two points characteristic of these works are especially significant. First, although their success is questionable at least to Western eyes, in form these productions clearly represent serious attempts to achieve some synthesis of traditional and more modern and realistic Chinese dramatic styles, plus even some Western elements in their music and staging, in line with Mao's injunctions to "make the past serve the present and foreign things serve China".\* Second, and probably more significant, however, is the fact that in

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\* "Creating the Socialist New, Fostering Proletarian Originality". Peking Review No.38, September 20, 1968 (an article on Peking opera with piano accompaniment!)

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content and setting these "new revolutionary dramas" are new only in their injection of a few direct quotations from Chairman Mao into their dialogue. Apart from this, they are all set in the past (two during the anti-Japanese resistance period, which increasingly appears to represent a "golden age" of Chinese Communism, one during the Civil War against the Nationalists immediately after, and one during the Korean War) and all emphasize the standard themes of many similar Communist films: the suffering and evils of the bad old days, present difficult but glorious resistance to invasion and oppression, and a vision of the brighter future ahead. But this future, at least part of which should now be the actual present, is never actually shown. It seems that "transformation" is more difficult to depict, let alone achieve, than are "struggle" and "criticism" - or perhaps it is really less attractive.

#### New and Old in the Great Cultural Revolution

In the official Maoist view, of course, the Cultural Revolution sees the old and new as black and white; one of its chief slogans has promoted the "four new" - new ideas, culture, customs, and habits - in opposition to the corresponding "four olds." But this can hardly be the whole story, and it is always enlightening to compare verbal statements with other information on behavior.

We have already noted here some aspects of the Cultural Revolution in which the new and the old are not so neatly separated and opposed, and further instances are easy to find. A simple but striking example is given by a photograph of a 1966 Red Guard demonstration in Canton: the red banners and slogans leading their revolutionary parade are immediately followed by a traditional Chinese dragon - almost the epitome of old culture and customs.

The question of the relationship between old and new, however, remains important because it is basic to the nature of the Cultural Revolution, and remains difficult because it is usually oversimplified and distorted by both sides; the Maoists claim almost everything in the Cultural Revolution is new and good, while anti-Maoists claim everything is new and bad. Let us therefore examine one more limited but significant case, and then attempt a summation of our several viewings of this matter.

In the early days of the Cultural Revolution, the Red Guards led in a widespread and intensive push to rename streets, schools, film studios, and towns. Some degree of similar renaming has accompanied successful political movements in other times and places, but in the Cultural Revolution the demands extended even to shops and individuals with "feudal" or "bourgeois" names. Traditional names, some decades or even centuries old, were to be replaced with revolutionary names such as "The East is Red". On the face of it, this certainly appears a clear emphasis on new versus old. Yet even here the matter is far less simple. The key fact is that from ancient times right up to the present names and naming have always been considered very important in China; a suitable and auspicious name for anyone or anything supposedly possessed positive influences bordering on word-magic. Thus, in the very act of promoting the new specifically, the Red Guards were invoking, and indeed greatly re-emphasizing, the old at a deeper and more general level.

Such "newness", involving putting new content into an old form, is also

prominent in most of the other areas of the Cultural Revolution we have here examined. Most commonly, the change of content involves an inversion - that from "bourgeois" to "revolutionary" names, or the inversion of scholar-worker status described for the educational revolution. In some instances, however, there may be only some simpler substitution of new content without such marked inversion. This, for example, appears to be the case for that Chinese Communist change which, though not explicit, is most profound and sweeping of all: the attempted substitution of the nation for the family as the primary focus of social efforts and loyalties. Another major pattern of old and new is often interwoven with such putting new wine in old bottles. It involves the assertion, and apparent conviction, that new and revolutionary changes will be achieved by total commitment to some behavior or attitude - for example, selfless service to society.- that on any wider view appears only as one half of a traditional Chinese pair of related opposites - in this case, profound emphases on fulfilling social obligations and correspondingly profound individualism. In one more pattern, the "new" may largely represent the elevation of an old but formerly minor theme to major importance; an example would be the grandparent-grandchild basis of Mao's relationship with the Red Guards.

The cultural viewpoint taken here of course inherently tends to highlight any persistence of old themes. But even allowing for this, major contradictions certainly exist between the simple revolutionary aim of replacing the old with the new - which is impossible in any social system - and these patterns of actual change that intermingle the new at one point with reinforcement of the old at another. Some implications of these contradictions will be examined in the final section.

## VI "CULTURAL REVOLUTION" - WHY

The question, "Why did the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution occur?" involves problems of both individual and social motivation, and of dynamics and

change. It therefore appears even more difficult than the previous question, "What is the Cultural Revolution?", which is mainly concerned with descriptive characterization. Fortunately, even though writers on the Cultural Revolution have often seemed too eager to explain why it occurred to pay sufficient attention to studying what it is, this second question may be actually the less important, since: 1) It is not possible to explain why anything occurs until it is clear just what has occurred. 2) In any complex interlocking system, much of what occurs depends on ongoing interactions among constituent elements more than on any linear development from some original cause, so that a systematic account of what occurs subsumes much of the why. For example, it is increasingly being realized that an adequate grasp of the present nature of a family behavioral system is often more pertinent for understanding and future handling of any problems it presents than is information about how matters originated; the case may be quite similar for political systems.

Nevertheless, the "Why?" question deserves whatever answer, considering these points, can reasonably be given. To begin with, the question may be divided into two distinguishable though closely related parts: 1) Why any further revolution in China at this period? 2) Why a cultural revolution? The latter question seems more limited and specific, and thus perhaps also more difficult. Yet it will be considered first. Some relevant insights making this question more accessible follow rather directly from the preceding analysis of the nature of the Cultural Revolution, and in turn these appear to offer some clues to the broader question.

The most significant characteristic of the Cultural Revolution, in this connection, is what might best be called its "ultimacy". There are several important respects in which this movement stands out as the ultimate Chinese Communist revolution. 1) This note is struck explicitly to a considerable extent in the Maoist characterizations of the movement. The Cultural Revolution, it

is true, is referred to as a "new stage", but also as a stage "that touches people to their very souls and constitutes, ... a stage which is both broader and deeper"\* even than all that has gone before. When. (summarizing much of the

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\* "Decision of the Central Committee ... ", op. cit.

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preceding analysis) its observable major features are reviewed, this ultimate nature becomes still more plain. 2) The movement's aims are highly utopian, involving not only sweeping changes in the structure of society, but the inner remolding of the entire population into persons who will be wholly selfless in service to society, and also be "universal men" in productive and creative abilities.\*\* 3) The Cultural Revolution is extremist in nearly all respects - its

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\*\* Granqvist, op. cit., p. 19.

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ubiquity, its intensity, and the black-and-white absolutism of its distinctions of right and wrong and its disregard of any and all outside opinion. 4) The means of the movement and its intermediate goals also involve the core aspects of Chinese thought and life, whether their focus is on turning old fundamentals upside down, or on enormous re-emphasis of traditional Chinese ways that had been undergoing modification under the influence of the modern world.\*\*\*

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\*\*\* The Chinese Communist revolution has always included a strong covert strain of cultural revitalization (Cf. Weakland, John H., Chinese Political and Cultural Themes: A Study of Chinese Communist Films, China Lake, U.S. Naval Ordnance Test Station, NOTS TP 4029, August 1966, p. 47); this is even more pronounced in the Cultural Revolution, yet usually is completely overlooked.

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Thus both in degree and directions, The Cultural Revolution appears as an ultimate step in the Chinese Revolution, and correspondingly, since so much has already been tried, this is a logical - if not perhaps the only - course for any further Chinese Communist revolution to take.

This course also is personally appropriate to its chief architect and promoter. Mao was a Chinese before he was a Marxist, and far more than for most Communist leaders, his world has been only his native country. His brand of Communism has always shown underlying Chinese influences, which have grown with time. Now he is old, yet still struggling to realize his dreams. In this situation it is quite understandable that his views of aims and means should increasingly relate to basic aspects of Chinese culture, the things first learned in childhood and youth. Although this might well happen anywhere, it is even more likely in China where, in contrast to the long years of careful, practical responsibility during maturity, there is unusually strong identification of early youth and old age.

But what are the perceived failures of the earlier revolutions, the remaining problems so serious that Mao believes a further and ultimate revolution is still needed? This subject is repeatedly discussed by the Maoists in terms of the survival of bourgeois values and the dangers of revisionism, but to outside observers these statements by themselves do not appear very enlightening or convincing. A final cultural viewing of the critical targets of the Cultural Revolution and its proposed remedies and goals can, however, again clarify the situation.

Chinese culture has always been strongly characterized by profound polarities - diametric oppositions at all levels from the yin versus yang of folk philosophy, and their many associated opposites, to distinctions in daily affairs between public and private life, patient endurance of difficulty and sudden violent outbursts, verbal agreement and behavioral opposition. Even the very emphasis Chinese have put on "the middle way" or "the golden mean" since Confucian times suggests prolonged search for escape from the dangers of polar extremes rather than an achieved stable mid-position; they have protested too much. It is very important that at the same time that such polarities are recognized, more or less explicitly, as real and significant, both of the opposed elements



are accepted as inevitable or necessary, or even as good and desirable in certain respects or situations. At least partly as a result of this viewpoint, stable syntheses or long-term adjustments between such opposed elements seem very rare in Chinese society. Instead, these polarities and their associated problems typically been dealt with by methods which have served to point them out, to contain and handle them in limited ways or temporarily, and yet to perpetuate them over the long run.

The basic method has been one of segregation and compartmentalization, so that one sort of behavior is promoted in certain contexts, while its opposite is allowed in others. Thus, as mentioned, social obligations were traditionally very great within the Chinese family, but so minimal outside this circle that foreigners have often been shocked by apparent Chinese indifference to the suffering of strangers. A different compartmentalization operated for the national society; there was little restraint on the absolute authority of the Chinese government, but its actual contact with the people ordinarily was quite limited.

Such divisions according to social context were supplemented by others concerned more with form and substance. Thus family obligations were primarily obligations of proper behavior, leaving inner thoughts and feelings more free to the individual person. Somewhat similarly, if words and names properly expressed ideal styles and aims, then the realities referred to could be left more to themselves.

One further division involved time, in two different ways. Divisions of time could be involved, along with other criteria, in establishing appropriate contexts for different kinds of behavior; there would be a proper time and setting for efforts on behalf of others and another for being cared for by them - in the largest scale, maturity versus childhood and old age. Also, however, there has been in China a deep conviction of the essentially cyclical nature of time. At this level, time is not arranged or controllable, yet it still operates both to display polar divisions and to average them out again eventually. "When

the sun has reached its meridian, it declines, and when the moon has become full, it wanes."\* So it is too in human social affairs; it was a common expectation

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\* Appendix I to The Book of Changes (I Ching)

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in China - often supported with observable evidence - that a properly diligent man might establish that ideal, a prosperous "big family", but that in a few generations it would decline and divide.\*\* So too has been the history of the

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\*\* Cf. Lin, Yueh-hwa, The Golden Wing, New York, Oxford University Press, 1947.

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nation, varying back and forth between strength, unity, prosperity, and fragmentation, conflict, poverty.

Even Mao has, from his revolutionary standpoint, viewed Chinese history in essentially this way. In "The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party"\*\*\*

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\*\*\* Mao Tse-tung. The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party (1939). Peking, Foreign Languages Press.

See also the analysis of part of this work in John H. Weakland, "Family Imagery in a Passage by Mao Tse-tung", World Politics 10, 387-407 (1958), especially pp. 392-3.

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he describes the glorious revolutionary history of China's peasant revolts over centuries, noting clearly that even the successful revolts failed, by developing again into dynastic regimes very like those they had overthrown. Only this time, Mao insists, the case will be different, the cycle of sliding back will be forever broken. This same concern about breaking an old cycle is also very evident for the Cultural Revolution. As we have seen earlier\*\*\*\*, the initial statement of the

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\*\*\*\* Above, p. 8.

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Central Committee about the Cultural Revolution emphasized how the bourgeoisie had been overthrown, yet how they still posed a threat to the revolution, which

the Cultural Revolution must settle, once and for all. The matter is again summed up in similar form in "Raise High the Great Red Banner of Mao Tse-tung's Thought and Carry the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution Through to the End", which states:

Over the past 16 years, there has been one struggle after another on the ideological and cultural fronts, each more profound than the one before.... A handful of representatives of the bourgeoisie, constantly and stubbornly trying to assert themselves, have been desperately holding onto their bourgeois ideological stronghold and engaging in frantic anti-Party and anti-socialist activities. Make trouble, fail, make trouble again, fail again, till their doom - that is the logic of all reactionaries.\*

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\* The Great Socialist Cultural Revolution in China (5), Peking, Foreign Languages Press, 1966, p.11.

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This "logic of reactionaries", as Mao sees it, is a precise counterpart to his view of recurring revolutionary successes, which must be ever renewed, until the achievement of final and ultimate victory.

The critical, the essential, question follows: How do the Maoists propose to break out of the cycle and achieve that final victory, after which there will be no more backsliding? In that curious way so often found in the Cultural Revolution, the answer that has been so difficult to see has been plainly and repeatedly stated.\*\* For example, as a high Party official characterized its

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\*\* The key to this paradox probably lies in misunderstanding and obscurity around the central questions.

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final and highest goal, beyond the power struggle:

The Cultural Revolution is a movement to rid our minds of the ego and replace it with public spirit. But because of human weakness, it is very difficult to cleanse our minds of private desires such as the yearning for an easy life

or personal advancement. We must, however, get rid of personal desires. Unless we do this, our minds will be occupied by revisionistic thoughts. It is useless to repeat the movement to wrest power from the authority clique if our minds are not cleansed. Because of this spiritual aspect of the struggle, we may say that the revolution touches the soul.\*

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\* Yomiuri Shimbun staff, op. cit., pp. 266-267.

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That is, the essential obstacle to durable social good is seen as a polarity and conflict between "public spirit" and "personal desires", idealistic dedication to social goals and "individualism". The resolution proposed by the Cultural Revolution is the universal establishment of one and the complete extinction of the other.

Idealism focused on visions of social order, justice, and cooperation is common among revolutionaries, including Marxists. But it also has indeed been a very prominent and powerful theme throughout Chinese history. Especially, it has been central in the thoughts and dreams of the "outsiders", those Chinese excluded from, disenchanted with, or peripheral to the "establishment", ranging from philosophers to active rebels. It is one major theme common to Confucius and Lao-tzu, though their views on the way to achieve social harmony were almost opposite. Both the fictional rebels in novels such as All Men are Brothers and actual ones like the Taipings have sounded this note - often as a war-cry. Mobilization of such idealism has produced profound changes in China in the past. By the same emphasis on a vast mass scale, repeatedly exemplified from the beginning in both his writings and his organizational means, Mao also has been able to move mountains and even achieve many practical ends - so long as he was operating from a position of opposition, against the Japanese, against Chiang, against harsh nature, and finally together with idealistic youth against the "revisionists" in authority in his own government.

Yet practical and materialistic concerns, the other side of the polarity, have also been strong and prominent throughout Chinese culture and history, evidenced again and again by the extent of bureaucratism, great differences in social position and power, and narrow concerns with the immediate personal welfare of one's family and, within this, oneself. There is no good reason to expect these emphases automatically to disappear with the Communist revolution's achievement of power - especially since they traditionally are associated with occupancy of positions of authority, large or small. Indeed, Mao's own view of Chinese history implies the reverse. What is more likely is that such deep-rooted cultural tendencies would reinforce those trends toward increasing concern with immediate material problems and rewards that begin to develop, both among officials and among the common people, as soon as any revolutionary regime begins to become the new establishment, as it must.

From an outside view, such developments would not necessarily be seen as corruption or backsliding, and one could conceive of possible ways of containing or adjusting to them. It is obvious, however, that Mao and his close adherents approach this situation very differently, and in the clear light of hindsight this follows almost inevitably from their basic conceptions: That "public spirit" and "personal desires" are fundamentally antithetical, and that a historical cycle of reform and reaction must be broken. Given this viewpoint, even minor appearances of "individualism" are likely to be perceived as a threat to the revolution, as a sign that although successful it is not settled. Such a threat may be all the more disturbing, in fact, because it still occurs after "victory" and involves not landlords and capitalists, but Party members and officials - who by this logic must therefore be seen as "revisionists" at heart and in essence, whatever their past history of service to the revolution.\* This also implies that, as with

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\* The enormous practical domestic problems and difficulties in foreign relations facing the Chinese Communist leaders, though not our focus here, must also contribute toward rigidity and absolutism in all these judgments.

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Confucius' fifty-year struggle (above, p. 18), no one is completely immune to "individualism", and even Mao may unconsciously be fighting inner psychological as well as outer social struggles. These threats cannot be handled by any basic compromise or adjustment; this would appear as an abandonment of the fundamental polarity on which Mao's whole life and revolutionary career has been based. Instead, they are met by further promotion of the same basic views and means, so that a regenerative cycle is set up. Rectification campaigns are mounted; these may provide limited and temporary solutions by reinforcing idealism and attacking "individualism", but the polarization is made even more pronounced with each repetition of this process.\* Finally, this process progresses to its limit: the

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\* Because of this key viewpoint, the Maoists can display great tolerance in reaccepting persons who have admitted their errors of "individualism" and reformed, but equal intolerance for those who do not acknowledge even minor "personal desires" to represent original sin.

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attempt to make a total distinction in concept between social interest and self-interest, and in practice to completely establish the one while completely abolishing the other, accompanied by corresponding demands for total commitment and total action - the old private areas of feeling and behavior, even of inaction, quite logically are also supposed to be abolished. This, then, is the fundamental origin of the Cultural Revolution.

Where will it all end? As just seen, the Maoist logic of the situation provides no place to stop short of a final solution, yet on any wider view there is every reason to believe that this process can never reach its envisioned goal. Theoretically, one side of a polarized pair of opposites can not be expanded without limit, until it becomes the whole; instead the very sharpening of the polarization begins to reinforce what is supposedly being abolished. Practically, this appears to be occurring already, as struggles against the Cultural Revolution testify. The other side of the movement's ultimacy is that "the ultimate"

also suggests a last recourse. So soon after far-reaching political and economic revolutions, the insistent demand for still "broader and deeper" revolution conveys a note of final desperate effort. Even with a people possessing the powerful idealistic social orientation of the Chinese, and strongly motivated by past miseries - of which the Cultural Revolution constantly reminds them - calls for further and more complete "public-spirited" effort must eventually reach a point of diminishing returns, if not inversion.

It is still conceivable that this stage has not even yet been reached, especially since some moves toward consolidation and reacceptance of people and groups attacked under the Cultural Revolution have been visible in recent months. But the broader problem remains - how can some more stable synthesis between utopian idealism and practical realism, "public spirit" and "personal desires" be achieved in China, and on a national scale. If so, there should be more likelihood of seeing the development of a country that would, though Communist and stable, be occupied primarily with improving its practical domestic affairs. Perhaps this could only be begun by some redefinition of individual interests as representing social values, which does not seem presently likely. Yet until some resolution of this problem at least begins, it is probable that Communist China must either become still more Maoist, which might even continue after Mao's death for some time, or collapse again into apathy, corruption and disunity on a scale matching the intense efforts of recent years to achieve the reverse. Apart from the enormous human suffering that would probably occur along with this, such an outcome also would be unlikely to promote world peace and security.



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